

ELFRIDA,

A

Dramatic Poem.

Written on the MODEL of

The Ancient GREEK Tragedy:

By Mr. MASON.

THE THIRD EDITION.

Printed in the Year M D C C L I X.

Persons of the Drama.

ORGAR, earl of Devonshire.

CHORUS, of British virgins.

ELFRIDA, daughter to ORGAR.

ATHELWOLD, husband to ELFRIDA.

EDWIN, a messenger.

EDGAR, king of England.

ORGAR disguis'd in a peasant's habit speaks the
prologue.

SCENE, a lawn before ATHELWOLD's castle in
Harewood Forest.



E L F R I D A,

' A

Dramatic Poem.

O R G A R.

HOW nobly does this venerable wood,
 Gilt with the glories of the orient sun,
 Embosom yon fair mansion! The soft air
 Salutes me with most cool and temp'rate breath;
 And, as I tread, the flow'r-besprinkled lawn
 Sends up a gale of fragrance. I should guess,
 If e'er Content deign'd visit mortal clime,
 This was her place of dearest residence.
 Grant heav'n! I find it such. 'Tis now three months,
 Since first earl Athelwold espous'd my daughter.
 He then besought me, for some little space
 The nuptials might be secret; many reasons,
 He said, induc'd to this: I made no pause,
 But, resting on his prudence, to his will
 Gave absolute concurrence. Soon as married,
 He to this secret seat convey'd Elfrida;
 Convey'd her as by stealth, enjoy'd, and left her:
 Yet not without I know not what excuse
 Of call to court, of Edgar's royal friendship,
 And England's welfare. To his prince he went:
 And since, as by intelligence I gather,
 He oft revisits this his cloyster'd wife;
 But ever with a privacy most studied,
 Borrowing disguises, till inventive art
 Can scarce supply him with variety.
 His visits, as they're stol'n, are also short;
 Seldom above the circuit of one sun:
 Then back to court, while she his absence mourns
 Full many a lonely hour. * I brook not this.

Had Athelwold espous'd some base-born peasant,
 This usage had been apt: but when he took
 My daughter to his arms, he took a virgin,
 Thro' whose rich veins the blood of ancient kings
 Ran in unfullied stream. Yes, her high lineage
 Would give her place and notice with the noblest
 That shines in Edgar's court. Why is not she
 In that resplendent throng? Her beauty too
 (I speak not from a father's foolish fondness)
 Would smile amid the loveliest, and reflect
 No vulgar glory on that beauty's matter.
 This act bespeaks the madman. Who, that own'd
 An em'rald, jasper, or rich chrysolite,
 Wou'd hide its lustre? he would bid it blaze
 Conspicuous, in the front of that fair wreath
 Which binds his brow. Haply this Athelwold
 May have espous'd some other. 'Sdeath he durst not,
 My former fears in arms must have inform'd him,
 That Orgar, while he liv'd, would never prove
 A traitor to his honor. If he has—
 This aged arm is not so much unstrung
 By slack'ning years, but just revenge will brace it.
 And, by yon awful heav'n—but hold, my rage.
 I came to scrutinize this matter coolly.
 Hence, to conceal the father and the earl,
 This pilgrim's staff, and scrip, and all these marks
 Of vagrant poverty.

Chorus (within)

Hail to thy living light, ambrosial morn!

All hail thy rosent ray!

Or. But hark, the sound of sweetest minstrelsy
 Breaks on my ear. The females, I suppose,
 Whom Athelwold has fixt my child's attendants;
 That, when she 'waits the absence of her lord,
 Their lenient airs, and sprightly-fancied songs,
 May steal away her woes. See, they approach:
 I'll wait the cadence of their harmony,
 And then address them with some feigned tale:

[*He retires.*]

C H O R U S.

O D E.

Hail to thy living light,
 Ambrosial morn ! all hail thy roseat ray :
 That bids gay nature all her charms display
 In varied beauty bright ;
 That bids each dewy-spangled flowret rise,
 And dart around its vermeil dies ;
 Bids silver lustre grace yon sparkling tide,
 That winding warbles down the mountain's side.

Away, ye goblins all,
 Wont the bewilder'd traveller to daunt ;
 Whose vagrant feet have trac'd your secret haunt ;
 Beside some lonely wall,
 Or shatter'd ruin of a moss-grown tow'r,
 Where, at pale midnight's stillest hour,
 Thro' each rough chink the solemn orb of night
 Pours momentary gleams of trembling light.

Away, ye Elves, away :
 Shrink at ambrosial morning's living ray ;
 That living ray, whose pow'r benign
 Unfolds the scene of glory to our eye,
 Where, thron'd in artless majesty,
 The cherub beauty sits on nature's rustic shrine.—

C H O R U S, O R G A R.

Chorus.

Silence, my sisters. Whence this rudeness, stranger,
 That boldly prompted thine unbidden ear
 To listen these our strains ?

Or. Your pardon, virgins :
 I meant not rudeness, tho' I dar'd to listen ;
 For ah ! what ear so fortified and barr'd
 Against the tuneful force of vocal charms,
 But would with transport to such sweet assailants
 Surrender its attention ? Never yet

Have I past by the night-bird's 'custom'd spray,
 What time she pours her wild and artless song,
 Without attentive pause and silent rapture;
 How could I then, with savage disregard,
 Hear voices tun'd by nature sweet as hers,
 Grac'd with all art's addition?

Cho. Thy mean garb,
 And this thy courtly phrase but ill accord.
 Whence, and what art thou, stranger?

Or. Virgins, know
 These limbs have oft been rob'd in fairer vest:
 But what avails it now? all have their fate;
 And mine has been most wretched.

Cho. May we ask
 What cruel cause——

Or. No! let this hapless breast
 Still hide the melancholy tale.

Cho. We know
 There oft is found an avarice in grief;
 And the wan eye of sorrow loves to gaze
 Upon its secret hoard of treasur'd woes
 In pining solitude. Perhaps thy mind
 Takes the same pensive cast: if not, indulge
 The tender temper of our virgin souls,
 Which loves to melt in sympathizing tears
 And social sighs.

Or. Ah! ill would it become ye,
 To let the woes of such a wretch as I am,
 E'er dim your bright eyes with a pitying tear.

Cho. The eye, that will not weep another's sorrow,
 Should boast no gentler brightness than the glare,
 That reddens in the eye-ball of the wolf.
 Let us entreat——

Or. Know, virgins, I was born
 To ample property of lands and flocks,
 On this side Tweeda's stream. My youth and vigor
 Atchiev'd full many a feat of martial prowess:
 Nor was my skill in chivalry unnoted
 In the fair volume of my sov'reign's love;

Who ever held me in his best esteem,
 And closest to his person. When he paid,
 What all must pay, to fate; and short liv'd Edwy
 Mounted the vacant throne, which now his brother
 Fills (as loud fame reports) right royally;
 I then, unfit for pageantry and courts,
 Retir'd me with a set of chosen vassals,
 To my paternal seat. But ah! not long
 Had I enjoy'd the sweets of that recess,
 Ere by the savage inroads of base hinds,
 That sallied frequent from the Scottish heights,
 My lands were all laid waste, my people murder'd;
 And I, thro' impotence of age unfit
 To quell their brutal rage, was forc'd to drag
 My mis'ries thro' the land, a friendless wand'rer.

Cho. We pity and condole thy wretched state,
 But we can do no more; which, on thy part,
 Claims just returns of pity: for whose lot
 Demands it more than theirs, whom fate forbids
 To taste the joys of courteous charity;
 To wipe the trickling tears, which dew the cheek
 Of palsy'd age; to smooth it's furrow'd brow,
 And pay its grey hairs each due reverence?
 Yet such delight we are forbid to taste;
 For 'tis our lord's command, that not a stranger,
 However high or lowly his degree,
 Have entrance at these gates.

Or. Who may this tyrant——

Cho. Alas, no tyrant he; the more our wonder
 At this harsh mandate: tenderness and pity
 Have made his breast their home. He is a man
 More apt, thro' inborn gentleness, to err,
 In giving mercy's tide too free a course,
 Than with a thrifty and illiberal hand
 To circumscribe its channel. This his praise
 You'll hear the general theme in Edgar's court:
 For Edgar ranks him first in his high favor;
 Loads him with honors, which the earl receives,
 As does the golden censer frankincense,

Only to spread a sacred gale of blessings
Thro' all the realm.

Or. Methinks, this pleasing portrait
Bears strong resemblance of lord Athelwold.

Gho. Himself: no Briton but has heard his fame.

Or. 'Tis wondrous strange; can you conceive no cause
For this his conduct?

Gho. None, that we may trust.

Or. Your garbs bespeak you for the fair attendants
Of some illustrious dame, the wife, or sister
Of this dread earl.

Gho. On this head too, old man,
We are commanded a religious silence:
Which strictly we obey; for well we know
Fidelity's the best and fairest wreath,
That can adorn a servant's brow. Farewell,
Depart with our best wishes; we do trespass
To hold such open converse with a stranger.

Or. Stay, virgins, stay; have ye no friendly shed,
But bord'ring on your castle, where these limbs
Might lay their load of misery for an hour?
Have ye no food, however mean and homely,
Wherewith I might recruit defective nature?
Ev'n while I speak, I feel my spirits fail;
And well, full well, I know, these trembling feet,
Ere I can pace a hundred steps, will sink
Beneath their wretched burthen.

Gho. Piteous sight!
What shall we do, my sisters? To admit
This man beneath the roof, would be to scorn
The earl's strict interdict; and yet my heart
Bleeds to behold that white, old, rev'rend head
Bow'd with such misery.—Yes, we must aid him.
Hie thee, poor pilgrim, to yon neighb'ring bow'r,
O'er which an old oak spreads his awful arm,
Mantled in brownest foliage, and beneath
The ivy, gadding from th' untwisted stem,
Curtains each verdant side. There thou may'st rest,
There also find some dry'd, autumnal fruit,

Lodg'd in the hollow of its aged trunk.
Much do we wish 'twere better fare.

Or.

Kind heav'n !

Reward ———

Cho. Nay ! stay not here to thank us,
But haste to give your age this poor assistance.
That done, we do conjure you leave the place
With cautious secrecy ; for was it known,
That thus we trespass'd on our lord's command,
The consequence were fatal.

Or.

Fairest maid !

Think not I'll basely draw down punishments
On my preservers. I withdraw. May blessings
Shower'd from yon fount of bliss repay your kindness.

[Exit Orgar.]

Semicho. Yes, sisters, yes, when pale distress.
Implores your aiding hand,
Let not a partial faithfulness,
Let not a mortal's vain command
Urge you to break th' unalterable laws
Of heav'n-descended charity.
Ah ! follow still the soft-ey'd deity ;
For know, each path she draws,
Along the plain of life,
Meets at the central dome of social joy.
Follow the soft-ey'd deity ;
She bids ye, as ye hope for blessings, bless.
Aid then the gen'ral cause of gen'ral happiness.

Semicho. Humanity ! thy awful strain
Shall ever meet our ear,
Sonorous, sweet, and clear.
And as amid the sprightly-swelling train
Of dulcet notes, that breath
From flute or lyre,
The deep base rolls its manly melody,
Guiding the tuneful choir ;
So thou, humanity, shalt lead along
Th' accordant passions in their moral song,
And give our mental concert truest harmony.

Cho. But see, Elfrida comes.

Should we again resume our former strain,
And hail the morn that paints her waking beauties,
Or wait her gentle bidding? Rather wait;
For, as I think, she seems in musing mood:
And there are times, when to the pensive soul
The warbling voice of softest melody
Seems but discordant harshness.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

Elfrida.

O my virgins;
With what a leaden and retarding weight,
Does expectation load the wing of time?
How have these three dull hours crept languid on,
Since first the crimson mantle of the morn
Skirted yon gay horizon? Say, my friends,
Have I miscounted? Did not Athelwold
At parting fix this morn for his return.
This dear long-wish'd-for morn? He did, he did,
And seal'd it with a kiss; I could not err.
And yet he comes not. He was wont outstrip
The sun's most early speed, and make its rising
To me unwish'd and needless. This delay
Creates strange doubts and scruples in my breast.
Courts throng with beauties, and my Athelwold
Has a soft, susceptible heart, as prone
To yield its love to ev'ry sparkling eye,
As is the musk-rose to dispense its fragrance
To ev'ry whisp'ring breeze; perhaps he's false,
Perhaps Elfrida's wretched.

Cho.

See, Elfrida,

Ah see! how round yon branching elm the ivy
Twines its green chain, and poisons what supports it:
Not less injurious to the blooming shoots
Of growing love is sickly jealousy.

Elf. My mind nor pines with sickly jealousy,
Nor triumphs in security and peace.
Who loves, must fear; and sure who loves like me,

Must greatly fear.

Cho. Yet whence the cause? Your earl
Has ever yet (this little breach excepted)
Been punctual to appointment. Did his eye
Glow with less ardent passion when he left you,
Than at the first blest meeting? No, I mark'd him,
His parting glance shot fervent, constant love,
And seal'd unalter'd. Do not fear him.

Elf. I should not fear him, was his present stay
The only cause. Alas, it is not, virgin!
Why comes my earl so secret to these arms?
Why, but because he fears some other fair
Should hear of his stol'n transports? Why am I
Here shrouded up, like the pale votarist,
Who knows no visitant, save the lone owl,
That leaves his ivy-crested battlement,
And sails on slow wing thro' the cloyster'd isles,
List'ning her faintly orisons? Methinks,
She who can boast earl Orgar for her sire,
(Orgar, whom copious Deva hails her lord
Thro' each rich vale she laves,) might well expect
To share the sports and splendor of the palace.

Cho. Covet not that; the noblest proof of love
That Athelwold can give, is still to guard
Your tender beauties from the blasting taint
Of courtly gales. The delicate soft tints
Of snowy innocence, the crimson glow
Of blushing modesty, there both fly off,
And leave the faded face no nobler boast
Than well-rang'd, lifeless features. Ah, Elfrida,
Should you be doom'd, which happier fate forbid!
To drag your hours thro' all that nauseous scene
Of pageantry and vice; your purer breast,
True to its virtuous relish, soon would heave
A fervent sigh for innocence and Harewood. [lace

Elf. You much mistake me, virgins; the throng'd pa-
lance Were undesir'd by me, did not that palace
Detain my Athelwold. If he was here,
His presence would convert this range of oaks

To stately columns; these gay liv'ried flow'rs
 To troops of gallant ladies; and yon deer,
 That jutt their antlers forth in sportive fray,
 To armed knights at joust or tournament.
 If Athelwold dwelt here; if no ambition
 Could lure his steps from love, and this still forest;
 If I might never moan his time of absence,
 Longer than that which serv'd him for the chace
 Or of the wolf, or stag; or when he bore
 The hood-wink'd falcon forth; might these, my virgins,
 And these alone, be love's short intervals,
 I should not have one thought remote from Harewood.

Cho. And would you wish that Athelwold should slight
 The weal of England, and on these light toys
 Waste his unvalued hours? No, fond Elfrida;
 His full-plum'd soul is wing'd for nobler flights:
 There let it soar, nor, like the lofty lark,
 That rides the sun-beam warbling, sudden drop
 And roost itself in the low earthy furrow.

Elf. What then, must England's welfare hold my earl
 For ever from these shades?

Cho.

We say not that.

The youth, who baths in pleasure's limpid stream
 At well-judg'd intervals, feels all his soul
 Nerv'd with recruited strength; but if too oft
 He swims in sportive mazes thro' the flood,
 It chills his languid virtue. For this cause
 Your earl forbids, that these enchanting groves,
 And their fair mistress should possess him wholly.
 He knows he has a country and a king,
 That claim his first attention; yet be sure,
 'Twill not be long, ere his unbending mind
 Shall seek a soft asylum from those cares,
 Amid th' embow'ring shades that veil Elfrida.

Elf. O be that speech prophetic; may he soon
 Seek these embow'ring shades! Meanwhile, my friends,
 Tune some harmonious lay, whose melting notes
 Flow in such sprightly descant as may speed
 The lazy hours, that now move slowly on

With dull and flagging pinion. For sweet music
 Has got a magic spell to aid their flight,
 And make them skim thro' their diurnal round
 Swift as the swallow circles. Come, ye virgins,
 Ye have been nurs'd amid yon Cambrian rocks,
 Where yet posterity retains some vein
 Of that old minstrelsy, which whilom breath'd
 Thro' each time-honor'd grove of British oak.
 There, where the spreading consecrated boughs
 Fed the sage mistletoe, the holy Druids
 Lay rapt in moral musings; while the bards
 Call'd from their wiry harps such solemn airs,
 As drew down fancy from the realms of light
 To paint some radiant vision on their minds,
 Of high mysterious import. Virgins, wake
 Some strain as sweetly soothing. I, reclin'd
 On yonder neighb'ring bank, will watch his coming.

[Exit Elfrida.]

CHORUS.

ODE.

The Turtle tells her plaintive tale,
 Sequester'd in some shadowy vale;
 The Lark in radiant æther flotes,
 And swells his wild extatic notes:
 • Meanwhile on yonder hawthorn spray
 The linnet wakes her temp'rate lay;
 She haunts no solitary shade,
 She flutters o'er no sun-shine mead,
 No love-lorn griefs depress her song,
 No raptures lift it loudly high,
 But soft she trills, amid th' aerial throng,
 Smooth simple strains of sob'rest harmony.

Sweet bird! like thine our lay shall flow,
 Nor gaily loud, nor sadly slow;
 For to thy note sedate, and clear,
 Content still lends a list'ning ear.
 Reclin'd this mossy bank along,
 Oft has she heard thy easy song:

Why hears not now? What fairer grove
 From Harewood lures her devious love?
 What fairer grove than Harewood knows,
 More woodland walks, more fragrant gales,
 More woodbine bowers, inviting soft repose,
 More streams flow-wand'ring thro' her winding vales.

Perhaps to some lone cave the rover flies,
 Where lull'd in pious peace the Hermit lies.

For, scorning oft the gorgeous hall,
 Where banners wave with blazon'd gold,
 There will the meek-ey'd nymph delight to call,
 And with the solemn seer high converse hold.

There, goddess, on the shaggy mound,
 Where tumbling torrents roar around,
 Where pendant mountains o'er your head
 Stretch their formidable shade;
 You listen, while the holy seer
 Slowly chaunts his vespers clear;
 Or of his sparing melf partake,
 The sav'ry pulse, the wheaten cake,
 The bev'rage cool of limpid rill.

Then, rising light, your host you bless,
 And o'er his faintly temples bland distill
 Seraphic day-dreams of heaven's happiness.

Where'er thou art, enchanting maid,
 Thou soon wilt smile in Harewood's shade:
 Soon will thy fairy feet be seen,
 Printing this dew-impearled green;
 Soon shall we mark thy gestures meek,
 Thy glitt'ring eye, and dimpled cheek,
 What time thou seek'st, with willing haste,
 Thy lov'liest throne, Elfrida's breast.
 There seated on that iv'ry shrine,
 Where all the loves and graces lye,
 With them your hands shall mutual chaplets twine,
 And weave immortal wreaths of peace and joy.

And, hark, compleating our prophetic strain,
The fleet hoof rattles o'er the slinty plain;
Now nearer, and now nearer sounds.

Avaunt ! ye vain, delusive fears.

Hark ! Echo tells thro' Harewood's amplest bounds,
That love, content, and Athelwold appears.

ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

Athelwold.

Look ever thus ; with that bright glance of joy
Thus alway meet my transports. Let these arms
Thus ever fold me ; and this cheek, that blooms
With all health's op'ning roses, press my lips,
Warm as at this blest moment.

Elf.

Athelwold,

I had prepar'd me mahy a stern rebuke ;
Had arm'd my brow with frowns, and taught my eye
Th' averted glance of coldness, which might best
Greet such a loit'ring lover ; but I find,
'Twas a vain task ; for this my truant heart
Forgets each lesson, which resentment taught,
And in thy sight knows only to be happy.

Athel. My best Elfrida—heav'ns ! It cannot last.
The giddy height of joy, to which I'm lifted,
Is as a hanging rock, at whose low foot
The black and beating surge of infamy
Rolls ready to receive, and sink my soul.

Elf. So soon to fall into this musing mood——

I thought, my lord, you promis'd you would leave
These cares behind at court. Nay, 'twas the cause
Assign'd for this my residence at Harewood,
That you might never come to these fond arms,
But with a breast devoid of public toil,
And fill'd alone with rapture and Elfrida.
Said you not so ? Why then that pensive look,
That down-cast eye, that settled musing posture ?
Surely the city's din, and this still forest
Have lost their difference. Wherefore stay I here ?
I'll with you to the palace.

Athel.

Heav'n forbid!

Elf. Nay, my best lord, I meant it but in sport;
 For should you bid me quit these blooming lawns,
 For some bare heath, or drear unpeopled desert;
 Believe me, I would think its wildness Eden,
 If Athelwold with frequent visitation
 Endear'd the savage scene: but yet I fear
 My father.

Athel.

Hah! why him?

Elf.

You know his temper:

How jealous of his rank, and his trac'd lineage
 From royal ancestry. I fear me much,
 He will not brook you should conceal me long
 In this lone privacy: no, he will deem it
 Far unbecoming her, whose veins are fill'd
 With the rich stream of his nobility.
 Should it be so, his hot and fiery nature,
 I doubt, will blaze, and do some dreadful outrage.

Athel. He need not know it, or, if chance he should,
 It matters not, if so this forest life
 Seem of your own adoption and free choice.
 And that it will so seem, I trust that love,
 Which ever yet has met my wayward will
 With pleas'd compliance, and unask'd assent.

Elf. And ever shall: yet blame me not, my lord,
 If prying womanhood should prompt a wish
 To learn the cause of this your strange commotion,
 Which ever wakes, if I but drop one thought
 Of quitting Harewood.

Athel.

Go to the clear surface
 Of yon unruffled lake, and, bending o'er it,
 There read my answer.

Elf.

These are riddles, Sir——

Athel. No; for its glassy and reflecting surface
 Will smile with charms too tempting for a palace.

Elf. Does Athelwold distrust Elfrida's faith?

Athel. No: but he much distrusts Elfrida's beauty.

Elf. Away: you trifle.

Athel.

Never more in earnest;

I would not for the throne which Edgar sits on,
That Edgar should behold it.

Elf. What, my lord,
Think you the face, that caught your single heart,
Will make all hearts its captives? Vain surmise.
Yet grant it could; the face is yours alone:
Not Edgar's self would dare to seize it from you.
Edgar's a king, and not a tyrant.

Athel. True,
Edgar's a king, a just one; his firm feet
Walk ever in the fore-right road of honor:
Nor do I know what lure can draw his steps
Devious from that straight path, save only one:
That tempting lure is beauty. Ah! Elfrida,
Throw but the dazzling bait within his view,
The untam'd wolf does not with fiercer rage
Burst the slight bondage of the silken net,
Than he the ties of law. Late, very late,
Smit casually with young Matilda's face,
He strait commanded her reluctant mother
To yield her to his arms: nor had she 'scap'd
The violating fervor of his love,
Had not the prudent dame suborn'd her handmaid,
To take the unchast office, and be led
Veil'd in the mask of night, to Edgar's chamber
A counterfeit Matilda. As it chanc'd,
The damsel pleas'd the king, nor did detection
A whit abate his fondness; he forgave
The prudent mother, eas'd Matilda's fears,
And led the wanton minstrel to his court,
Where still she shares ———

Cho. Behold, earl Athelwold,
A messenger arrives; his speed and aspect
Speak some important errand.

EDWIN, ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

Athelwold.

How now, Edwin?

Edwin. The king, my lord, is on his way to Harewood.

Athel. The king !

Edwin. His purpose is to pass thro' Mercia;
And in a hasty message, some two hours
After you left the palace, this his pleasure
Was sent you by lord Seofrid ; withall
Commanding your attendance. You being absent
He straitway turn'd his course thro' this fair forest,
Meaning to chase the stag ; his train is small,
As was his purpose sudden.

Elf. Good my lord,
Why thus perplex'd ?

Cho. Heav'ns ! what a deep despair
Sits on his brow.

Elf. The notice sure is short ;
But that's a trifle, a small train requires
The smaller preparation : let him come.

Athel. Yes, let him come : so thou wilt say, Elfrida,
When thou hast heard my tale. Yes, let him come :
So wilt thou say, and let thy husband perish.
Yet shall these arms once more embrace thee closely,
Ere yet thou fly them as the pois'nous adder.
'Tis o'er : in that embrace Elfrida's love
Was buried ; and in that embrace, the peace
Of wretched Athelwold.

Elf. What may this be !

Athel. O Edwin, Edwin, when surviving malice
Shall prey upon the fame of thy dead master,
Wilt thou not someway strive to check the fiend's
Insatiate fury ? Wilt thou see my name
Defil'd, and blacken'd with detraction's venom,
And bear it patiently !

Elf. What means my best —

Athel. Peace ; not a word of best, or lov'd, or dear !
These are not titles now for thee to use,
Or me to triumph in. Virgins, retire ;
We would awhile be private. Nay, return,
Concealment would be vain ; and ye and Edwin
Are bound to me. Albina ! as for you,
I sav'd your father, when his blood was forfeit.

Cho. Not I, great earl, alone, but all this train
Are bound by ev'ry tie of faith and love
To gen'rous Athelwold; to that mild master,
Who never forc'd our slavery to one act,
But of such liberal sort, as freedom's self
Would smilingly perform.

Athel. It may be so,
But where's the tie, Elfrida, that may bind
Thy faith and love.

Elf. The strongest sure, my lord,
The golden, nuptial tie. Try but its strength.

Athel. I must perforce this instant. Know, Elfrida,
Once, on a day of high festivity,
The youthful king, encircled with his nobles,
Crown'd high the spark'ling bowl; and much of love,
Of beauty much the sprightly converse ran.
When, as it well might chance, the brisk lord Ardolph
Made gallant note of Orgar's peerless daughter,
And in such phrase as might enflame a breast
More cool than Edgar's. Early on the morrow
Th' impatient monarch gave me swift commission
To view those charms, of which lord Ardolph's tongue
Had giv'n such warm description: to whose words
If my true eye gave credence and assent,
I had his royal mandate on the instant
To hail you queen of England.

Elf. 'Stead of which
You came, and hail'd me wife of Athelwold.
Was this the tale I was so taught to fear?
Was this the deed, that known would make me fly
Thy clasping arm, as 'twere the poisonous adder?
No, let this tender, fond embrace assure thee,
That thy Elfrida's love can never dye;
Or, if it could, this animating touch
Would soon rewake it into life and rapture. [Everign,

Athel. Dost thou then pardon me? Come, injur'd so—
Plunge deep thy sword of justice in this breast,
And I will dye contented.

Elf. Heav'n forbid!

What can be done ?

Cho. Indeed, ye constant pair,
'Tis fit ye strive to fly the coming danger.
For safety now sits wav'ring on your love,
Like the light down upon the thistle's beard
Which ev'ry breeze may part. Say, noble earl,
What feint was us'd to lull the king's impatience ? [*bride,*

Athel. Soon as these shades had veil'd my beauteous
I hasted back to Edgar, laugh'd at Ardulph,
And talk'd of Elfrid, as of vulgar beauties ;
Own'd no uncommon light'ning in her eye,
No breast that sham'd the snow, or cheek the rose.
The sprightly king believ'd me, and forgot her.

Cho. But an alliance, great as Athelwold's
With Orgar's daughter, soon would blaze abroad,
The theme of popular converse.

Athel. True, it would ;
And for that reason, when I last was here,
The king was taught I went to wed Elfrida.

Elf. How so, my lord ?

Athel. Thy father, my Elfrida,
Has rich possessions : these, and these alone,
I made my theme of love ; and told the king,
'That tho' thy face (pardon the impious falsehood)
Boasted not charms to grace a monarch's throne,
Yet would thy dow'r well suit his minister.
I therefore meant to ask thee of thy father,
And (that my want of skill in choice might 'scape
All censure) hide thee close in Harewood castle.
Edgar with smiles consented, and, I think,
Harbours no thought of my disloyalty.

Elf. If so, what danger now ?

Athel. Ask'st thou, what danger ?
'Sdeath, will that glance not instantly proclaim
My tenfold treachery ?

Elf. He shall not see me.
I'll hide me instant in some secret chamber,
And robe this virgin in my bridal vestments. [*wounds*

Athel. Thy love, like balm, runs trick'ling o'er the

Of my torn bosom; yet 'tis vain, 'tis vain;
Thou must thyself appear, for Ardulph ever
Attends the king, and would detect the fraud.

Elf. If so, yet still I can ensure our safety;
For as you fear my softness of complexion,
I'll stain it with the juice of dusky leaves,
Or yellow berries, which this various wood
From tree or shrub will yield me. These I'll use,
And form a thousand methods to conceal
The little gleams of grace, which nature lent me.
Fear not my caution.

Athel. Gent'lest, best of creatures,
Go, do then as thy tender care directs.
And yet how vain? What wond'rous art can steal
The liquid lightnings from those radiant eyes,
Or rob the wavy ringlets of that hair
Of all their nameless graces? Say it could,
Yet would that modest, but majestic mien,
That inborn dignity of soul, which breaths
Thro' each angelic gesture, still remain
To seize the heart of Edgar. Rest, Elfrida,
Rest as thou art, in all that blaze of beauty:
I must submit to my just lot and lose thee.

Elf. Away, my lord, with these too timid scruples:
Fear not my carriage; I will stoop my head,
Drawl out an idiot phrase, and do each act
With ev'n a rude and peasant awkwardness.

Edwin. Ere this, my lord, I think, the king has reach'd
The full midway; 'twere fit you stood prepar'd
To give him meeting.

Athel. Give him meeting, Edwin!
Alas, I have no mask to veil my baseness.
When deep contrition shadows all my soul,
I cannot dress my features in light smiles,
And look the thing I am not. No, these eyes
Are not as yet true vassals to my purpose,
As yet indeed I am but half a villain.

Elf. You weigh this matter in too nice a balance.
Your crime, my lord, is but the crime of love.

Thousands like you have fail'd.

Athel.

Millions have broke

Their faith for beauty: and if beauty's beam
Could blanch the stains of falshood, that bright glance
Would change the ebon darkness of my crime
To whitest innocence. But oh! it cannot;
Ev'n while I gaze upon it, conscience tells me
I ought not to have wrong'd the best of masters.——
But thou art mine, and as thou art, Elfrida,
I will or die or keep thee.

Elf.

Live, or die,

I'm thine alike. Death cannot aught abate,
Or life augment, my love. Let this embrace
Be witness of my truth.

Athel.

It shall, it shall:

Thy ev'ry word and look declares thee faithful,
Secure of all thy love, and all thy prudence,
Returning confidence has arm'd my soul
For this dread meeting: resting on thy truth
I go——

[*Exit Athelwold.*]

Elf.

Go, and thy guardian saint preserve thee,
Show'r blessings vast as would my lavish love,
Had I his power to bless thee!

Cho.

Yes, my sisters,

The silent awe that reigns thro' all your train,
Befits ye well. Let no unhallow'd tongue
Dare to profane her virtue by its praise.
'Tis a bright prodigy, which admiration
Must stand in silent gaze at, and behold
Full-plum'd perfection take its eagle flight
Above ambition, sov'reignty, and pride;
Above——

Elf.

What could ambition to a heart

So fill'd with love as mine? If my late act
Had aught of noble and superior grace,
Impute it all to love, to virtuous love,
Than which what passion more impels the mind
To fair and gen'rous action? But the hours
Are precious now. I'll to yon neighb'ring grove:

There grows an azure flow'r, I oft have mark'd it,
Which stains the pressing finger, with a juice
Of dusky, yellow tinct : its name I know not.
I'll fetch and try it strait. Wait my return. [*Exit Elfrida.*]

CHORUS.

ODE.

Whence does this sudden lustre rise,
That gilds the grove? Not like the noontide beam,
Which sparkling dances on the trembling stream,
Nor the blue lightning's flash swift-shooting thro' the skies.

But such a solemn steady light,
As o'er the cloudless azure steals,
When Cynthia riding on the brow of night,
Stops in their mid career her silver wheels.

Whence can it rise, but from the sober pow'r
Of *Constancy*? She, heav'n-born queen
Descends, and in this woodbine-vested bower,

Fixes her stedfast reign :
Stedfast, as when her high command
Gives to the starry band
Their radiant stations in heav'n's ample plain.
Stedfast, as when around this nether sphere,
She winds the purple year.

Tells what time the snow-drop cold
Its maiden whiteness may unfold,
When the golden harvest bend,
When the ruddy fruits descend.
Then bids pale winter wake, to pour
The pearly hail's translucent show'r,
To cast his silv'ry mantle o'er the woods,
And bind in crystal chains the slumb'ring floods.

The soul, which she inspires, has pow'r to climb
To all the heights sublime
Of virtue's tow'ring hill.

That hill, at whose low foot weak-warb'ling strays
The scanty stream of human praise,
A shallow trickling rill.

While on the summits hov'ring angels shed,
 From their blest pinions, the nectareous dews
 Of rich immortal fame : from these the muse
 Oft steals some precious drops, and blends with art
 With those the lower streams impart ;
 Then show'rs it all on some high favor'd head.
 But thou, Elfrida, claim'st the genuine dew ;
 Thy worth demands it all,
 Pure, and unmixt on thee the sacred drops shall fall.

Elfrida returns with flowers.

ELFRIDA, ORGAR, CHORUS.

Elfrida. [*looking on the flower.*]

'Tis strange, my virgins, this sweet child of summer,
 Silken and soft, whose breath perfumes the air,
 Whose gay vest paints the morn, should in its bosom
 Hide such pollution ? Yet 'tis often thus :
 All are not as they seem.

Or.

Yet hear me, lady.

Elf. Begone, unmanner'd stranger, nor pursue me ;
 Hence, from the grove. Know ye this pilgrim, virgins ?
 On my return I met him here.

Cho.

Alas ;

He came at break of day, and told a tale,
 That mov'd our pity—but I fear me now,
 'Twas false ; some spy perchance, and may have heard—

Or. I have ; yet not for that are you betray'd.

Fair excellence, my heart is bound unto you,
 I feel a tender interest in your welfare,
 Tender as fathers feel.

Elf.

As fathers feel ;

That well-known voice, and ah ! that look —

Or.

Elfrida !

Elf. Yes, it is he, it is my father, virgins.
 Support me, or I faint ! O wherefore, Sir ? —

Or. Take courage, daughter ; my parental fondness
 Prompted this visit. Thus I came disguis'd,
 To learn the cause of my dear child's confinement.

And I have learnt it.

Elf.

Then all's lost for ever.

Or. Thou know'st, Elfrida, next my house's honor,
Thy peace has ever been my dearest care.
But such an insult—no : I cannot brook it.
So black a fraud ! By all my ancestors,
By Offa's shade, I will have ample vengeance.

Elf. Alas, I know too well your dreadful purpose.
I knew it at the first. Yes, he must fall.
Yet pardon me, if my poor trembling heart
Puts up I know not what of pray'rs and vows
To ev'ry pitying saint. Celestial guardians
Of nuptial constancy ! O bend from heav'n
Your star-crown'd heads, and hear a wretched woman,
That begs ye save, from a dread father's rage,
Her lord, her husband.

Or. Husband ! 'Sdeath what husband ?
Is Athelwold thy husband ? Sooner call
Th' impeached thief true master of the booty
He stole, or murder'd for. Disdain the villain ;
And help me to revenge thee.

Cho. Think, great earl,
What sanctimonious ties restrain your daughter.
Did she not swear before the hallow'd shrine
Eternal fealty to this her lord ?
Yet say, that he deceiv'd her ; shall her truth
Dare to revenge ? No, Sir, in highest heav'n
Vengeance mid storms and tempests sits enshrin'd,
Vest'd in robes of light'ning, and there sleeps,
Unwak'd but by th' incens'd Almighty's call.
O, let not man presume to take unbid
That dread vicegerency.

Or. Peace, virgins, peace.
The saws of druids, or the chaunt of bards,
Have little weight with me, when insults high
Rouse my just indignation. Hear me, daughter,
You went to search for flow'rs, to blot your charms
With their dun hue. Yes, you may search for flow'rs,
Yet shall they be the loveliest of the spring :

Flow'rs, that entangling in your auburn hair,
 Or blushing mid the whiteness of your bosom,
 May, to the power of ev'ry native grace,
 Give double life, and lustre. Haste, my child,
 Array thyself in thy most gorgeous garb,
 And see each jewel, which my love procur'd thee,
 Dart its full radiance. More than all, put on
 The nobler ornament of winning smiles,
 And kind inviting glances.

Elf. Never, never ;
 When this true heart renounces Athelwold,
 May equitable heav'n. —

Or. Nay, swear not, Elfrid ;
 But with a duteous, and attentive ear,
 Listen to my persuasions. Much I wish
 Persuasions might prevail, that not compell'd
 To use a father's just prerogative,
 My will may meet with thy unforc'd obedience.
 Follow me, on thy duty.

Elf. Cruel father,
 That duty shall obey you ; I will follow :
 Yet not to quit my love. So mercy shield me,
 As I hold true to Athelwold !

Exeunt Orgar and Elfrida.

Semicho. Horror ! horror !
 The pen of fate dipt in it's deepest gall,
 Perhaps on that ill-omen'd wall,
 Now writes th' event of this tremendous day.
 O ! that our weaker sight
 Could read the mystic characters, and spy
 What to the unpurg'd, mortal eye,
 Is hid in endless night.

Semicho. Suspense ! thou frozen guest, be gone.
 The wretch, whose rugged bed
 Is lin'd with thorns, more softly rests his head,
 Than he who sinks amid the cyncet's down,
 If thou tormenting feind be nigh,
 To prompt his starting tear, his ceaseless sigh,
 His wish, his pray'r, his vow for ling'ring certainty.

Cho. But hark ! that certainty arrives. Methought,
 I heard the winding horn. I did not err ;
 The king is near at hand. This quick approach
 Will sure prevent this proud earl's cruel purpose.
 Yet what of that ? Does her fair form require
 The blazon of rich vesture ? Genuine beauty
 Nor asks, nor needs it : negligence alone
 Is its bright diadem, and artless ease
 Its robe of Tyrian tincture. Say, my sisters,
 Shall we salute this monarch with a hymn
 Of festival and joy ! Alas, such joy
 Ill suits our trembling hearts, and weeping eyes.
 And now 'twere vain ; for see, the king approaches.

EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, CHORUS.

Edgar.

No, Athelwold ; not from a partial blindness,
 Or for the mode and guise of courtesy,
 Are we thus large in praise ; in our true judgment,
 'This castle is not more kind nature's debtor
 For this its happy site, than 'tis to thee
 For that just symmetry, and modest skill
 Which decks the general structure. Not a frieze,
 Or moulded pediment, but in its parts
 Claims kindred with the whole ; for ornament
 Is here the offspring of necessity,
 Not the vain flourish of unmeaning art.

[*seeing the chorus.*]

But ah ! what nobler beauties catch mine eye.
 Thy castle's beauty, my lov'd Athelwold,
 Has amplest proof, in having pow'r to hold
 Mine eye from such a prospect. Pardon, fair ones ;
 To take your graces thus at second note
 Was sure uncommon blindness.

Athel.

Heav'ns ! they weep.

What may this mean ? Some dread and unseen chance
 Has counterwork'd my safety.

Edgar.

Whence this silence ;

'Why are your lovely heads thus bow'd with sadness ?

Beshrew my heart, my lords, but this is strange.
 I know thee, earl, and know thy gentleness,
 More prone t'obey, than lord it o'er the sex;
 Else should I guess this sorrow had its rise,
 From some discourteous treatment.

Cho. No, dread sov'reign;
 He is the noblest, gentlest, best of masters;
 And may your love reward —

EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, EDGAR, CHORUS.

Athelwold.

Death to my hopes!

Or. Yes, villain, start; but let this vengeful arm
 Arrest thy baseness; would to heav'n its strength
 Thus grasping thee, could open thy false breast,
 And bare thy heart to the sham'd eye of day.

Edgar. Patience, hot man. What art thou?

Or. I am Orgar —

Pardon me, prince; that this my honest rage
 O'erleaps obedient duty. I am wrong'd,
 Yet that's but small; 'tis not my private wrongs
 But yours, much-injur'd prince, that call for justice.
 Yes, Sir, I here on a true subject's oath,
 Proclaim earl Athelwold a faithless traitor.

Edgar. Ha! what is this? Renounce the word, old earl;
 Thy length of years hath forc'd thee, sure, to press
 The verge of dotage. Athelwold! what Athelwold
 A faithless traitor? Perish the suspicion.
 Never before did word, or thought, or look,
 Give doubt of his distinguish'd loyalty.
 Dotage alone could frame the accusation.

Or. I do not dote, thank heav'n, my faculties
 Are yet my own, unblemish'd and unhurt.
 Would so my daughter were!

Edgar. What is his drift?

Athel. Better my royal lord you markt him not;
 The wayward earl is —

Or. What, audacious villain!
 I will be heard.

Edgar. Go to, thou choleric lord.

Or. When thou hast heard me, king, then call me

Edgar. Speak then and briefly. [choleric.

Or. Once my sacred liege,

I had a daughter, duteous as e'er crown'd
A father's wish, and lovely as could warm
A youth to am'rous transports. This, my lord,
You learnt long since from noble Ardulph's praises
And fir'd with his description, sent this earl,
This faithful earl, t'invite her to your throne.

Edgar. No, Orgar, not t'invite her to our throne,
Simply to note her beauty was his errand.

Or. Yes, he did note it, stamp'd it for his own.
But why this parley? Enter, Sir, these gates,
And let Elfrida's features be the book,
Where you may read the story of his fallhood,
E'en at one glance.

Edgar. Lead on then, noble lord.
We'll follow to the tryal. I will humour
The earl's hot temper. He has heard, my friend,
We meant t'exalt his daughter, and for that,
His partial fondness, link'd with his ambition,
Levels this rage at thee. Attend us, lords.

Exeunt Edgar, Orgar, &c.

CHORUS, ATHELWOLD.

Chorus.

My lord, the king is enter'd: stand not thus
In statue-like distress.

Athel. Away, away;
What! can a man that thinks such thoughts as I do
Have pow'r of act, and motion? speak to me;
Inform me all. What said she, when I left her?
How came her father hither? how did she
Greet his arrival? Say, was she compell'd,
Or did her free, and voluntary voice
Tell all the story? Did she marshall him,
To this his deed of vengeance?

Cho.

Dearest master;

Elfrida told him not : his own deceit
 Was his informer. Here the earl arriv'd
 Early at morn, in mean and pilgrim weeds,
 All like an antient, toil-worn traveller ;
 And with a tale told in such piteous strain,
 Fraught with such sad and moving circumstance,
 With woes so well dissembled : that our softness,
 Suffer'd him enter this close bower for rest,
 Which he adapting to his prying purpose,
 Thence learnt the secret. This our disobedience,
 We own——

Athel. Was my perdition, yet 'tis well ;
 I blame ye not ; it was the work of fate.
 Fate brought him hither, fate annull'd your faith.
 I do not think, you purpos'd my destruction ;
 But yet you have destroy'd me. O Elfrida,
 And art thou faithful ? This my jealous eye
 Thought it had markt some speck of change upon thee ;
 Thought it had found, what might have made thy loss
 Somewhat within endurance. 'Tis not so ;
 And this thy purity but serves t'augment
 The sum of my distractions. Meet me, Edgar,
 With thy rais'd sword : be merciful and sudden——

Exit Athelwold.

CHORUS.

ODE.

Say, will no white-rob'd son of light,
 Swift-darting from his heav'nly height,
 Here deign to take his hallow'd stand ;
 Here wave his amber locks, unfold
 His pinions cloth'd with downy gold ;
 Here smiling stretch his tutelary wand ?
 And you, ye host of saints, for ye have known
 Each dreary path in life's perplexing maze,
 Tho' now ye circle yon eternal throne
 With harpings high of inexpressive praise,
 Will not your train descend in radiant state,
 To break with mercy's beam this gathering cloud of fate !

'Tis silence all. No son of light
Darts swiftly from his heav'nly height
No train of radiant saints descend.

"Mortals, in vain ye hope to find,

"If guilt, if fraud has stain'd your mind,

"Or saint to hear, or angel to defend."

So *Truth* proclaims. I hear the sacred sound
Burst from the centre of her burning throne;
Where aye she sits with star-wreath'd lustre crown'd,
A bright sun clasps her adamant zone.

So *Truth* proclaims: her awful voice I hear,
With many solemn pause it slowly meets my ear.

"Attend, ye sons of men; attend, and say,"

Does not enough of my refulgent ray

Break thro' the veil of your mortality!

Say, does not reason in this form desert

Unnumber'd, nameless glories, that surpass

The angel's floating pomp, the seraph's glowing grace?

Shall then your earth-born daughters vie

With me? Shall she, whose brightest eye

But emulates the diamond's blaze,

Whose bosom mocks the fleecy snow,

Whose cheek the rose's damask glow,

Whose melting voice the warbling wood-lark's lays;

Shall she be deem'd my rival? Shall a form

Of elemental dross, of mould'ring clay,

Vie with these charms imperial? The poor worm

Shall prove her contest vain. Life's little day

Shall pass, and she is gone: while I appear,

Flush'd with the bloom of youth thro' heav'n's eternal year.

Know, mortals, know; ere first ye sprung,

Ere first these orbs in æther hung,

I shone amid the heav'nly throng.

These eyes beheld Creation's day,

This voice began the choral lay,

And taught archangels their triumphant song.

Pleas'd I survey'd bright nature's gradual birth,

Saw infant light with kindling lustre spread,

Soft vernal fragrance clothe the flow'ring earth,
 And ocean heave on his extended bed;
 Saw the tall oak aspiring pierce the sky,
 The tawny lion stalk, the rapid eagle fly.

Last, man arose, erect in youthful grace,
 Heav'n's hallow'd image stamp'd upon his face,
 And, as he rose, the high behest was giv'n,
 "That I alone of all the host of heav'n,
 "Should reign protectress of the godlike youth."
 Thus the Almighty spake: he spake and call'd me *Truth*.

ATHELWOLD, EDWIN, CHORUS.

Athelwold.

Banish me! No. I'll die. For why should life
 Remain a lonely lodger in that breast
 Which honor leaves untenanted. Vain breath I
 Thou ill can'st fill such vacancy. Begone.
 This sword shall free ———

Cho. O shame to fortitude!
 Shame to that manly passion, which inspires
 Its vigorous warmth, when the bleak blasts of fate
 Would chill the soul. O call the ready virtue
 Quick to thy aid, for she is ever near thee,
 Is ever prompt to spread her sevenfold shield
 O'er noble breasts.

Athel. And but o'er noble breasts;
 Not o'er the breast which livid infamy
 Indelibly has spotted. O shame, shame.
 Sword, rid me of the thought.

Cho. Forbear, forbear;
 Think what a sea of deep perdition whelms
 The wretch's trembling soul, who launches forth
 Unlicenc'd to eternity. Think, think,
 And let the thought restrain thy impious hand.
 The race of man is one vast, marshall'd army,
 Whose num'rous squadrons fill the plains of time,
 Their leader the Almighty. High in air
 That chos'n archangel rides, whose right hand wields

Th' imperial standard of his providence,
Which dreadly sweeping thro' the vaulted sky
O'er-shadows all creation.

Athel.

* I was once ———

Yes, I was once (I have his royal word for't)
A man of such try'd faith, such steady honor,
As mock'd all doubt and scruple.—What a change !
Now must that unstain'd, virgin character
Be doom'd to gross and hourly prostitution
Sating the lust of slander ; and my wife,
My chaste Elfrida ! O distraction, no,
I'll fly to save her.

Edwin.

Stay, my dearest master ;

You rush on instant death.

Athel.

I mean it, slave,

And would'st thou hinder me ?

Edwin.

Yes, Sir, I hold

'Tis duty to my king, and love to you,

Thus to oppose your entrance.

Athel.

What thou traitor !

Thy pardon, Edwin, I forgot myself ;
Forgot, that I stood here a banish'd man,
And that this gate was shut against its master.
And yet this gate leads to my dear Elfrida,
Can it be barr'd to me ? O earth, cold earth,
Upon whose breast I cast this load of mis'ry,
Bear it awhile ; and you, ye aged oaks,
Ye venerable fathers of this wood,
Who oft have cool'd beneath your arching shades
My humble ancestors, oft seen them hie
To your spread umbrage, from yon sultry field,
Their scene of honest labor. Shade, ah ! shade,
The last, the wretchedest of all their race.
I will not long pollute ye, for I mean
To pay beneath your consecrated gloom
A sacrifice to honor, and the ghosts
Of those progenitors, who sternly frown
On me their base descendant.

Edwin.

See, ye virgins,

See how despair beneath his ghastly brow
 Stretches her blackest cloud, thro' whose thick night
 His eyes fast-rooted in their angry rings
 Dart a dire glare.

Cho. Edwin, 'tis ever thus
 With noble minds, if chance they slide to folly;
 Remorse stings deeper, and relentless conscience,
 Pours more of gall into the bitter cup
 Of their severe repentance.

Athel. 'Tis resolv'd,
 I'll enter and demand a second audience.
 And yet how vain? Ere I can reach his ear,
 His ready train will stop me, and with all
 The cruel punctuality of office,
 So prompt to act 'gainst fallen favorites,
 Dismiss me with reproof.—Surely I heard her.
 Was't not Elfrida's voice? 'Tis she herself.

ELFRIDA, EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, ORGAR, CHORUS.

Elfrida.

No, I will once more clasp him to my bosom.
 I will not be withheld. I will o'ertake him,
 Will follow him to exile. Hah, my husband!
 So quickly found? They thought to tear me from thee,
 But we will part no more.

Edgar. Take heed, Elfrida,
 This ill-tim'd fondness may recall the fate
 I just now freed him from; who loves like me
 Can ill brook this. Or quit him, or he dies.

Athel. Yes, let me die! Death is my dearest wish.
 Quit me, Elfrida! leave me to my fate.
 'Tis just, 'tis just. Thus to my sov'reign's sword
 Freely I bare my breast. Strike, injur'd prince;
 But do not banish me.

Elf. What, Athelwold,
 Is then the life, on whose dear preservation
 Elfrida's peace depends, not worth the saving?
 Die then. But e'er thy murderer strikes the stroke,
 Let me inform him, that his act destroys

No single life.

Edgar. By heav'n, she loves the traitor
Beyond all hope of change ———

Elf. No, Athelwold,
Thou shalt not die. That pause in royal Edgar
Bespeaks calm recollection and weigh'd thought,
And his relenting tongue shall quickly seal
Thy liberal pardon. Come, my lord, let's kneel;
Now's the blest time; here let us kneel together,
And as these streaming eyes and lifted hands
Employ each act of silent supplication,
Do thou recount——Ah! no, thy modest tongue
Could never tell ev'n half the gallant story.
Be silent then. Let Edgar's self reflect,
For well I know his mem'ry writes thy virtues
Upon its fairest page. Yes, let him weigh
All thy past deeds of loyalty and faith,
'Gainst this so light a fault.

Edgar. So light a fault?

Had he dislodg'd my richest coffer'd treasures,
Dispers'd sedition's poison 'mid my troops,
Or aim'd with daring and rebellious hand
To snatch these regal honors from my brow,
I sooner could have pardon'd.

Athel. Cease, Elfrida,

My doom is just—yes, royal Sir, I'll go
To banishment. I do deserve to breath,
Deserve to bear this load of life about me
For many years; to lengthen out my age,
Listening the hourly knell of curst remembrance,
Whose leaden stroke shall tell to my sad soul—
That I was faithful once.

Elf. O flinty Edgar,

What! will this penitence not move thee? Know
There is a rose-lip'd seraph sits on high,
Who ever bends his holy ear to earth
To mark the voice of penitence, to catch
Her solemn sighs, to tune them to his harp,
And echo them in harmonies divine

Up to the throne of grace. Ev'n heav'n is won
By penitence, and shall heav'n's substitute,
Shall Edgar scorn ———

Edgar. Cease, cease, thou beauteous pleader !
Ah far too beauteous ! Wouldst thou gain thy suit,
Why glows that vermeil lip ? why rolls that eye
Bright as the ray of morn ? Why in each gesture
Such inexpressive graces ? Why, but because
They're native all, and will not be conceal'd.
Else sure each charm betrays him, and becomes
An advocate, whose silent eloquence
Pleads 'gainst thy tongue, and foils its strongest rhetoric.
Traitor ! was this the face which thy false tongue
Prophan'd as vulgar ? This such common beauty
As the fair eye of day beheld each hour
In ev'ry clime he lighted ? Base dissembler,
This instant quit our realm.

Elf. O stay thee, Edgar,
And once more hear me. At thy feet I fall
As earnest, and distressed a suppliant,
As e'er embrac'd the knees of majesty.
O spare thy country's guardian, Edgar, spare
Thy closest, surest friend. Let not one fault,
Cancell his thousand, thousand acts of faith.
Alas ! I fall to vainest repetition.
Grief, whelming grief drowns all my faculties
And leaves me nought but tears.

Edgar. Rise, rise, Elfrida.

Elf. Shall he then live ?

Edgar. He shall, he shall, my fair,
If so he quit the realm within the space,
Our sentence limited.

Elf. O stop not there ;
That sentence will be death to Athelwold.
Think, for thou know'st full well his gentle nature,
Can he support the rigour of this doom ?
Can he who liv'd but in thy gracious smiles,
Who'd pine, if chance those smiles a single hour
Were dealt him thriftily ; think can he bear

The infamy of exile?

Edgar.

Hear me, Athelwold.

Did I not show'r on thy much-favor'd head
My thickest honors, and with gift so ready
As out-run all request? Did I not hold thee,
Still in such open confidence of friendship?
Such love as ——

Athel.

Sooner stab me than repeat it.

Edgar. Yet give me hearing. I repeat not this
To taunt, or gall thee. On my soul, thy worth
Did o'ertop all those honors, and thy zeal
Kept pace with my best love. Nor till this deed ——
But such a deed! look there, look on that face.
Thou know'st me, Athelwold, hast seen me gaze
On a soft yielding fair one, till mine eye
Shot flames. Perdition seize me, earl,
If I knew love till now.

Athel.

I see it plainly,

Nor say I ought to lessen my offence.
No, here I kneel, Oh! cast but on my mis'ry
One kind forgiving glance; this ready sword
Shall expiate all.

Elf.

Ah! will you? must he die?

Edgar. No stay thee, Athelwold, and sheath thy sword,
I never yet (save but this hour of rage)
Deem'd thee my subject. Thou wert still my friend,
And, injur'd as I am, thou still art such:
I do forego the word; to banish thee
Or seal thy death, transcends a friend's just right.

Elf. It does, it does, surpassing goodness. Virgins,
The king will pardon him. Wake each high note
Of praise, and gratitude, teach Edgar's name
To Harewood's furthest echo. 'O my sov'reign,
What words can speak ——

Edgar.

Ah, check these transports, lady;

Left, if I see thee thus, my soul forget
Its fair resolve. I'll leave thee on the instant.
Yet first my lips must press this gentle hand,
And breathe one soft sigh of no common fervor.

Now on, my lords,—fair wonder of thy sex,
 Adieu. We'll strait unto our realm of Mercia.
 Yet first, as was our purpose, thro' this forest
 We'll chace the nimble roebuck; may the sport
 More please us, than we hope. Earl Athelwold,
 Thou too must join our train. Follow us straight.

Exit Edgar, &c.

Athel. I do, my liege. Elfrida, I have much
 For thy lov'd ear, and have but one farewell
 To tell it all—and yet——

Elf.

Ah loiter not,

It may enrage. Farewell. Be sure, take heed
 I come not in your talk, avoid ev'n thinking,
 Check ev'n the sighs of absence. Haste, my earl,
 Oh haste thee, as thou lov'st thy constant wife.

Exit Athelwold.

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

Orgar.

Thy constant wife! ah, slain of all thy race,
 Degen'rate girl! henceforth be Orgar deem'd
 Of soft, and dove-like temper, who could see
 A child of his stoop to such vile abasement,
 And yet forbore just wrath; forbore to draw
 That blood she had desir'd from her mean veins.
 But sure thou art not mine, some elf or fay
 Did spirit away my babe, and by curst charms
 Thee in her cradle plac'd. Nay hang not on me.
 Dry, dry thy tears, they've done their office amply.
 Edgar has pardon'd him. No, by my earldom
 I cannot think of majesty thus meanly.
 He'll yet avenge it: what if chance he should not?
 That stops not me; I have a heart, an arm,
 A sword can do me justice.

Elf.

Ah! my lord,

Are you still merciless? Alas, I hop'd—— [think

Or. What could'st thou hope, Elfrida? could'st thou
 I e'er would pardon his vile perfidy,
 Or thy ignoble softness?

Elf. Dearest father,
 Frown not thus sternly on me. I would fain
 Touch your relenting soul, fain win your heart
 To fatherly forgiveness. For thro' life
 I've oft had pleasing proof how that forgiveness
 Stoop'd to my fond persuasion. But I fear
 Persuasion now has left me. My sad thoughts
 Are all on wing, all following Athelwold,
 Like unseen ministering spirits :—Pardon, Sir,
 That frown shall check me, I'll not mention him;
 I will but plead for my own weakness, plead
 For that soft sympathy of soul, which you
 Deem base and servile. Base perhaps it might be,
 Were I of bolder sex. But I, alas!—
 Ah pardon me, if nature stamp'd me woman;
 Give me a heart soft, gentle, prone to pity,
 And very fearful. Fearful, sure, with cause
 At this dread hour, when if one hapless word,
 One sigh break forth unbidden, it may wake
 The king's lull'd rage—what has my phrenzy said;
 I've wander'd from my meaning. Dearest virgins,
 My rash tongue more inflames him. O assist me,
 Ye are not thus oppress'd with inward horror:
 Kneel, plead, persuade, convince ---

Cho. Alas, my mistress,
 What may a servant's accents do to appease
 This furious earl.

Or. Ye well may spare them: maidens,
 Know my firm soul's resolv'd, and be my heart
 Abject as Athelwold's, if I forego
 Its honest resolution. Yes, I'll wait
 The earl's return, and in his own domain
 Give him fair combat. I have known the time
 When this good arm had hardihood enough
 Forthrice his prowess. What is lost thro' age,
 My just cause shall supply; and he shall fall
 As did the traitor Oswald, whose false tongue
 Defam'd me to king Athelstane: to the ground
 My sharp lance nail'd the caitiff. [Exit Organ.]

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

Elfrida.

Think, my lord,
Will Athelwold, will he enter those lists,
Where conquest would be parricide ? Alas
He hears me not. Go, thou obdurate man.
A daughter's tears will but the more provoke thee,
I will not follow him. No, poor Elfrida !
All thou canst do is here to stand, and weep,
And feel that thou art wretched.

Cho. Dearest mistress,
Restrain this flood of tears, perhaps ---

Elf. Perhaps !
Ah ! mock me not with hopes.

Cho. We do not mean it :
For hope, tho' 'tis pale sorrow's only cordial,
Has yet a dull and opiate quality ;
Enfeebling what it lulls. It suits not you,
For, as we fear ---

Elf. Do you too fear ? Alas !
I flatter'd my poor soul that all its fears
Were grief's distemper'd coinage, that my love
Rais'd causeless apprehensions, and at length
Edgar would quite forgive. I do bethink me,
My joy broke forth too rashly. When they left us,
His safety was not half secur'd ; my pleading
Was not half heard ; I should have follow'd Edgar,
Claim'd more full pardon, forc'd him to embrace
My sorrowing lord.

Cho. We fear that sorrow more
Than Edgar's rage. We fear his fallen virtue.
Self-condemnation works most strongly on him,
Ev'n to despondency. Nay, at his pardon,
No joy flush'd on his cheek ; we mark'd him well,
He shew'd no sign of welcome. No, he took it.
As who should say, " to give me ought but death
" Is a poor boon unwish'd and unaccepted."
Too much we fear he'll do some impious act ---

Elf. What, on his life? I thought I had explor'd
Each various face of danger: this escap'd me.
How mist I this? It suits his courage highly;
Suits too his fixt remorse.—But yet he will not,
No, Athelwold, thou wilt not kill Elfrida.

Cho. O may his love preserve him: may these shades
Receive him soon in peace. To this blest end
You sure should strive to calm your father's rage,
At least not suffer him, as now, retir'd
To brood o'er his revenge. For solitude,
Which sooths the tranquil mind, has dread effects
On wrathful breasts. The same sequester'd pine,
Which veils the gurgling ringdove with its boughs,
Whets with its knotty trunk the boar's vext tooth,
And points each fang with death.

Elf. 'Tis true, my virgins;
Attend me then: I'll try each winning art,
(Tho' ill such art becomes me) yet I'll aim it. —
Hark—whence that noise? I heard some hasty footsteps.

Cho. O heavens! 'tis Edwin.

ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

Elfrida.

Edwin, ah! that look
Bespeaks too well the horror of thy errand.
Tell it me all.

Edwin.

Alas! —

Elf.

Nay, do not pause.
Tell it me all. I think it will not kill me.
Repeat each circumstance. I'm ready, Edwin,
Ev'n for the worst.

Edwin.

Then hear that worst, Elfrida.
Soon as the stag had left yon westward thicket,
The king dismiss'd his lords, each sev'ral ways,
To their best sport, bidding earl Athelwold,
Lord Ardulph, and myself attend his person.
Thus parted from the rest, the monarch pierc'd
A darkling dell, which open'd in a lawn
Thick set with elm around. Suddenly here

E

He turn'd his steed, and cry'd " This place befits
" Our purpose well."

Elf. Purpose! what purpose, Edwin?
'Twas predetermin'd then, dissembling tyrant!
How could I trust, or hope——

Edwin. Yet give me hearing:
Thus with a grave composure, and calm eye
King Edgar spoke. Now hear me, Athelwold,
Thy king has pardon'd this thy trait'rous act;
From each committed sin 'gainst majesty
Thou stand'st full franchis'd; yet there still remains
Somewhat to cancel more. As man to man,
As friend to friend, now, Athelwold, I call thee
Strait to defend thy life with thy good sword.
Nay, answer not; defend it gallantly.
If thy arm prosper, this my dying tongue
Shall pardon thee, and bless thee. If thou fall'st,
Thy parting breath must to my right resign
Elfrida's beauties. At the word, both drew,
Both fought, but Athelwold's was ill-play'd passion.
He aim'd his falchion at the monarch's head,
Only to leave his own brave breast defenceless.
And the first stroke of Edgar's rapid sword
Pierc'd my dear master's heart. He fell to earth,
And falling, cry'd, " This wound atones for all.
" Edgar thus full aveng'd will pardon me,
" And my true wife with chaste, connubial tears
" Embalm my memory." He smil'd, and dy'd.

Elf. Nay, come not round me, virgins, nor support me.
I do not swoon, nor weep. I call not heav'n
T'avenge my wretchedness. I do not wish
This tyrant's hand may wither with cold palsies.
No, I am very patient. Heav'n is just!
And, when the measure of his crimes is full,
Will bare its red right arm, and launce its light'nings.
Till then, ye elements, rest: and thou, firm earth,
Ope not thy yawning jaws, but let this monster
Stalk his due time on thine affrighted surface.
Yes; let him still go on; still execute

His savage purposes, and daily make
More widows weep, as I do. Foolish eyes!
Why flow ye thus unbidden? What have tears
To do with grief like mine?

Cho. Help, help, my sisters,
To bear her to the castle.

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

Orgar.

As I pass,
Methought I heard a sound of loud lament:
Elfrida, ha!

Elf. Is not my father there?
Withhold me not, I'll fall at his dear feet.
O Sir! behold your child thus lowly prostrate;
Avenge her wrongs, avenge your poor Elfrida,
Your helpless widow'd daughter.

Or. Widow'd daughter!
What! is he slain?

Elf. Inhospitably butcher'd;
The tyrant's savage self—Stand you thus cool?
Where is the Saxon spirit, where the fire
Of Offa's race?—O foolishness of grief!
Alas, I had forgot; had Edgar spar'd him,
That sword, to which my madness call'd for vengeance,
Ere long was meant to do the bloody deed,
And make the murder parricide. Have I
No friend to do me right?

Or. Thou hast, my child,
I am thy friend, thy father. Trust my care.
Edwin, a word. Retire, my dearest daughter:
Virgins, conduct her in.

Elf. My father, no.
What do you do? I must not be withheld.
I'll go to yon dire grove, and clasp my husband,
My murder'd husband. Why restrain me, Sir?
Can my sad eye dart fire thro' his cold breast,
And light up life anew?

Or. Go in, my child,

And seek tranquillity.

Elf.

And seek tranquillity !

Ah ! who will lead me to her darkling cell ?

I know her now, she is death's pale-ey'd sister,

Her mansion is the murky charnel vault,

Whence oft at midnight by the moon's pale gleam

She sees the neighb'ring Sexton with his spade

Upturn the green sword, delving the dank grave

Of some love-stricken maid. Yes, lead me thither.

Gho. This way, my dearest mistress.

Elf.

Hold, nay, hold ;

Croud not around me. Let me pause a while.

Albina, thou alone shalt join my mis'ry ;

I've much to utter to thy friendly ear.

Lead on, thou gentle maid ; thy single arm

Shall prop my trembling frame, thy single voice

Speak peace to my afflictions.

[Exit with the principal virgin.]

ORGAR, EDWIN, SEMICHORUS.

Orgar.

On your lives,

Virgins, let no disturbing step approach her.

Say, Edwin (for I guess 'twas you that brought

These tidings hither) where was royal Edgar,

When late you left him ?

Edwin.

At my master's side,

Repentant of the stroke.

Or.

Comes he not back

To Harewood ?

Semicho.

Heav'n forbid ! Elfrida's brain

Would madden at the sight.

Or.

Mistake not, virgins ;

I did not mean, at this distressful hour

The king should see my daughter.

Semicho.

No, for pity,

Do not profane this sabbath of her grief.

O be her sorrow sacred !

Or.

Fear not, virgins,

Her peace is my best care, and, to ensure it,
 I'll haste this instant by young Edwin's guidance
 To find the monarch. Some four miles from Harewood
 Stands old earl Egbert's castle, my fast friend.
 With him will I persuade the king to sojourn,
 Till my child's grief abate, that too to speed
 Be it your business, virgins. Watching ever
 Each happy interval, when your soft tongues
 May hint his praises, till by practice won
 She bear their fuller blazon. Elfrid's welfare
 Requires this friendly office at your hands;
 And Edgar's virtues bear such genuine lustre,
 That truth itself directs ——— [Exit Orgar.]

Semicho.

As truth directs,

So only shall we act. This day has shewn
 What dire effects await its violation.
 Strait is the road of Truth and plain,
 And, tho' across the sacred way
 Ten thousand false meanders stray,
 'Tis ours to walk direct,
 And, with sage caution circumspect,
 Pace slowly thro' the solemn scene.

[The principal virgin returns.]

CHORUS, SEMICHORUS.

Chorus.

Has Orgar left the grove?

Semicho.

He has, my sister.

Cho. Then hear, and aid Elfrida's last resolve,
 Who takes the only way stern fate has left
 To save her plighted faith for ever pure
 To her dead Athelwold.

Semicho.

Forbid it, patience;

Forbid it, that submissive calm of soul,
 Which teaches meek-ey'd piety to smile
 Beneath the scourge of heav'n.

Cho.

Ye need not fear it,

She means not self-destruction. Thanks to heav'n,
 Huge and o'erbearing as her misery is,

It cannot so obliterate from her breast
 The written rule of duty. Her pure soul
 Means, on the instant, to devote itself
 To heav'n and holiness. Assist her strait,
 Lest Edgar's presence, and her father's rage,
 Prevent the blest intention. See, she comes.
 Kneel on each side, devoutly kneel around her,
 And breath some pray'r in high and solemn strains,
 That angels from their thrones of light may hear,
 And ratify her vow.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

[*Elfrida kneels, and the virgins divide into two troops.*]

Semichorus.

Hear, angels, hear,
 Hear from these nether thrones of light ;
 And O in golden characters record
 Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
 Then wing your solemn flight
 Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
 Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
 'Mid the dread records of eternity.

Elf. Hear first, that Athelwold's sad widow swears
 To rear a hallow'd convent o'er the place,
 Where stream'd his blood ; there will she weep thro' life
 Immur'd with this chaste throng of virgins ; there
 Each day shall six times hear her full-voic'd choir
 Chaunt the slow requiem o'er her martyr'd lord ;
 There too, when midnight lours with awful gloom,
 She'll rise observant of the stated call
 Of waking grief, bear the dim livid taper
 Along the winding isles, and at the altar
 Kifs ev'ry pale shrine with her trembling lips,
 Press the cold stone with her bent knee, and call
 On sainted Athelwold.

Semicho.

Hear, angels, hear,
 Hear from these nether thrones of light,
 And O in golden characters record
 Each firm, immutable, immortal word ;

Then wing your solemn flight
 Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
 Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
 'Mid the dread records of eternity.

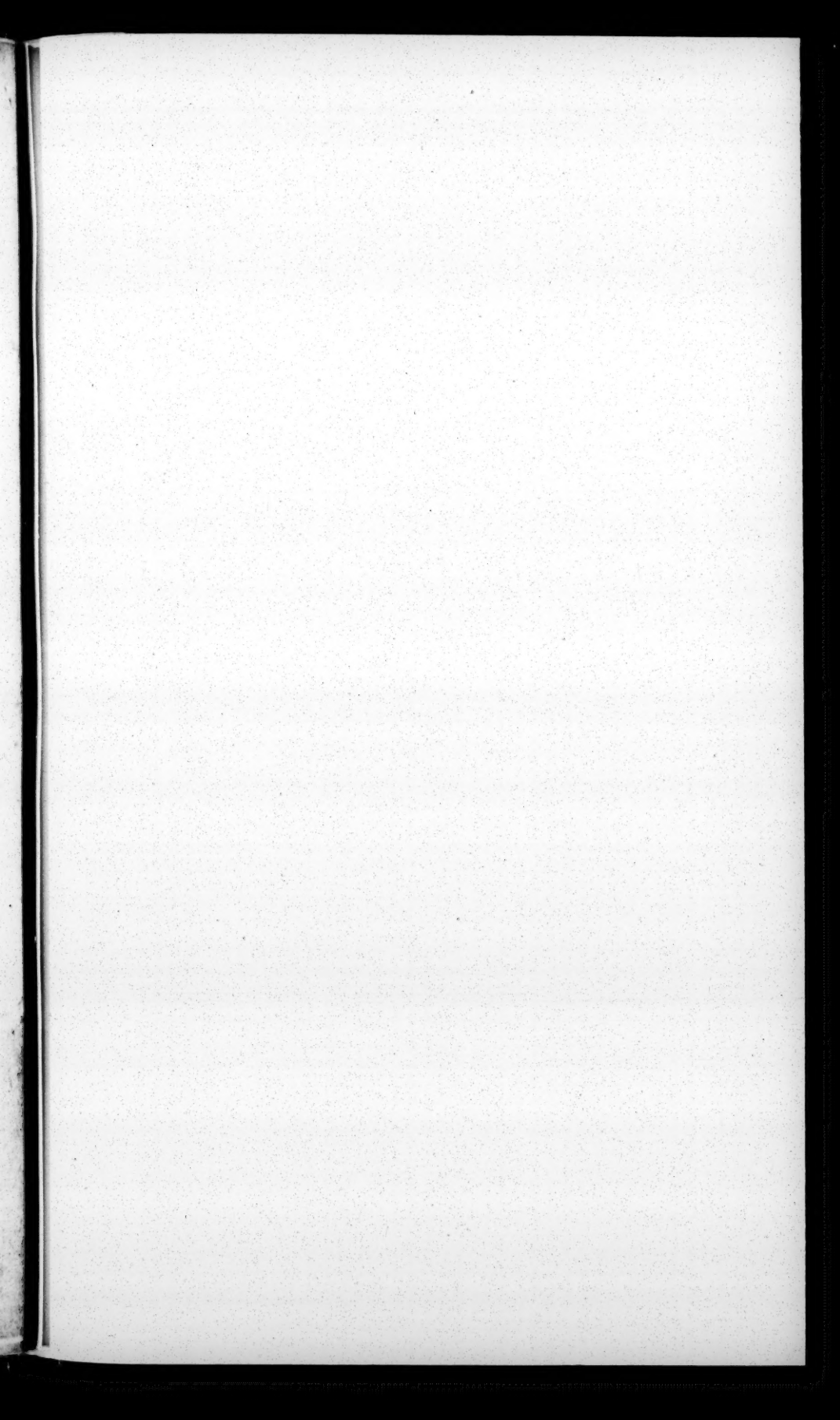
Elf. Hear next, that Athelwold's sad widow swears
 Never to violate the holy vow
 She to his truth first plighted; swears to bear
 The sober singleness of widowhood
 To her cold grave. If from this chaste resolve
 She ev'n in thought should swerve, if gaudy pomp,
 Or flatt'ring greatness e'er should tempt one with
 To stray beyond this purpose, may that heav'n,
 Which hears this vow, punish its violation
 As heav'nly justice ought.

Cho. Hear, angels, hear,
 Hear from these nether thrones of light,
 And O in golden characters record
 Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
 Then wing your solemn flight
 Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
 Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
 'Mid the dread records of eternity.

T H E E N D.

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Д. В. И. Е. В. Е.



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